

1 The Answer to Minority Rule

In a world increasingly hostile to race-based oligarchy, South Africa works unceasingly to widen its circle of accomplices. Its public relations machine orchestrates a perpetual wail on the theme 'why pick on us?'. It continually seeks admiration for its (often inaccurate) statistics on the incomes of its black inhabitants compared with the incomes of Africans living in areas of minimal resources and development.* It seizes upon every race riot, every famine, every exposure of intensive wage exploitation elsewhere in the hope that its own conduct will be judged by the lowest common denominator of human misery.

**In any case recent statistics show that the income of Africans in South Africa (by far the richest country on the continent) is only the 13th highest in Africa. The average per capita income of Africans in South Africa is R135. In Zambia, for example, it is R231. For the 7 million Africans in the homelands South Africa is near the bottom of the scale with an average per capita income of R72, of which half is earned in migrant workers' wages (Professor Jan Sadie, Dept. of Economics, University of Stellenbosch, quoted in Rand Daily Mail, 5 February 1975). South Africa's white population (just under 20% of the total) receives 76-5% of the country's gross domestic product (Rand Daily Mail, 9 August 1974).*

As a self-proclaimed 'bastion against Communism' South Africa claims an honoured place in the so-called 'free world' and finds it incomprehensible that in some respects (e.g. arms) even its friends and true allies can give it succour only by behaving like thieves in the night. It seeks acclaim for its terror-sanctioned stability by contrasting itself with the social disequilibrium in some areas of the Third World where newly-freed men are groping to lay a foundation for their future, while still contending with a historical heritage of colonial plunder and with continuing imperial interference.

But then the truth about apartheid has long been thoroughly and widely documented. Figures are easily available to show that there is no country on earth in which the ethnic origin alone of the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants condemns them to enjoy so trivial a proportion of its national riches. *This* surely is the test; not the unending stream of comparative statistics which pours forth from Pretoria.

And the ethical or moral qualities of apartheid are no more open to debate than the merits or demerits of Nazi race practices. For those who live apartheid's reality) not in debate but in their daily experience, the need to destroy it in all its manifestations is a self-evident truth. That is the starting point and the only remaining question is - how?

On this question the radical opposition movement within South Africa speaks with one voice: it is only through extralegal mass action including armed struggle that the white monolith can be shifted and a just society won. The African National Congress's 'Strategy and Tactics' states:

South Africa was conquered by force and is today ruled by force. At moments when white autocracy feels itself threatened, it does not hesitate to use the gun. When the gun is not in use, legal and administrative terror, fear, social and economic pressures, complacency and confusion generated by propaganda and 'education' are the devices brought into play in an attempt to harness the people's opposition. Behind these devices hovers force. Whether in reserve or in actual employment, force is ever-present and this has been so ever since the white man came to Africa. ¹

The illusion of the liberal gradualists, that apartheid will die a natural (albeit slow) death by the operation of the economic processes, has been demonstrably shattered by the events of the last three decades. This most dramatic period of economic advance, during which more and more Africans have been sucked into the modern industrial sector, has in fact been accompanied by a widening of the gulf between the races, by greater and not less repression, and by a growing gap between white and black incomes.

Before the Second World War, when South Africa was still on the threshold of its economic leap forward, the civic rights enjoyed by the black majority were paltry enough. They could by no stretch of the imagination be regarded as a suitable mechanism for achieving real change by constitutional methods. But since then, the little that had lingered on from the brave days of Cape liberalism has been systematically eroded. The Westminster-sanctioned compromise in 1909 between the white colonial governments in South Africa went the way of all compromises in which the victim is an unrepresented and powerless object of bargaining. The few Africans who had retained their place as electors on the Cape Common Roll were later segregated on a separate voters' roll, with three whites to represent them in the central legislature: only to have even this concession abolished - through a constitutional fraud - by the present regime.

The right to combine in political association across the colour line or on a platform of majority rule is no more. The outlawing of organizations such as the African National Congress, South African Communist Party, and Pan-Africanist Congress has been followed by a mass of draconian judicial and administrative measures to make effectual legal opposition impossible, and to harass and intimidate the voteless majority. What remained to blacks of the right to strike; marginal rights to freehold property in 87% of the national land area; the right to maintain a domicile in the urban complexes; the right to intimacy across the colour line; the right to study at the 'open'

universities: these have all been diminished to the point of meaninglessness or simply swept away since 1948.

Indeed, if events in the post-war period prove anything, it is that the more dependent the white establishment becomes on black sweat and black skill, the more jealous it becomes of its monopoly over economic and political privileges, and the more finely it sharpens those instruments which ensure its hegemony.

To take issue with this generalization on the ground that it ignores the new 'liberalism' which post-Verwoerdian apartheid has been recently projecting, is to dispute not so much the fact as the yardstick for measuring its significance. If the essence of apartheid were only the segregated park bench, the all-white playing fields, the Verwoerdian language of 'baaskap', the permanent bar against black mobility into higher skilled occupations, and the refusal to delegate bureaucratic function, then we are indeed witnessing signs (however minimal) of a retreat. Official organs of the ruling parry now join the 'unpatriotic' English press in making disparaging noises about 'petty apartheid'. Government Ministers belonging to the so-called enlightened (*Verligte*) faction talk about making the lot of the African urban dweller 'as happy as possible' and dismiss the idea that the homelands are 'dumping grounds for people we don't want in South Africa'.² Moreover, when Mr R. F. Botha, South Africa's chief delegate to the Security Council, told the United Nations in October 1974 that 'My Government does not condone discrimination purely on the grounds of race or colour, and we shall do everything in our power to move away from discrimination based on colour',³ he seemed to have come a very long way from Strijdom's arrogant threat to the same body in 1950 that the Whites 'shall fight to the last drop of our blood to maintain white supremacy in South Africa'.⁴

But those who see in all this a significant indicator of a move from the top for the redistribution of power in favour of a society based on equality, confuse the politician's rhetoric with the reality which it hides. They ignore the fundamental premise from which all elements (whether *Verligte* or *Verkrampste*) in the regime proceed. What separates a Strijdom and a Botha is not a retreat from white supremacy but rather a differing approach to securing that supremacy in two distinct periods: a period when the risks of internal upheaval and external pressures were not yet immediately menacing; and the present period, when the prospect of a black revolutionary breakthrough is no longer a distant nightmare but a discernible cloud on the horizon, and the mood among the blacks inside the country and along the Republic's increasingly exposed borders is one of growing national assertiveness.

The significance of the reforms which have already been conceded and those which may still come, and their relevance to the struggle equation, will be referred to again. At this point it is enough to say that the pragmatism of the Vorster variety is little more than a tactical redisposition calculated to streamline apartheid's machinery

and to fortify the main citadel of white control in a situation which, according to de Villiers Graaff, leader of the opposition United Party, 'has dramatically reduced both the time and the space which stands between us and the relentless approach of insurgency towards South Africa itself'.⁵

To understand the true meaning of the reforms which have already been made and those which are still promised, it is essential that we recognize the point beyond which South Africa will not and cannot go.

First, white South Africa (if it is to survive as such) will not and cannot allow a challenge to the claim which it lays to ownership and control of the wealth in 87% of South Africa's land area. Its new-found vigour in promoting so-called black 'self-government' in the remaining 13% is designed to legitimize this monstrous historical swindle. Neither is the political kingdom negotiable except for the trappings of office in South Africa's backyards which are being graced by the name of 'homelands' or 'Bantustans'. For those - the majority of the black people - who are forced in their lifetime to minister to the labour needs of the urban complexes and rich farmlands where most of them were born, there is no question of the vote or any other constitutional access to real power. What has always united and continues to unite all white South Africans (except, in the words of General Smuts, 'those who are quite mad')⁶ is the absolute and perpetual bar to political power-sharing in what is claimed to be 'white South Africa'.

'Call it paramountcy, baaskap or what you will,' said Strijdom,

'it is still domination. I am being as blunt as I can. I am making no excuses. Either the white man dominates or the black man takes over. The only way the European can maintain supremacy is by domination. And the only way they can maintain domination is by withholding the vote from the non-European. If it were not for that we would not be here in Parliament today.'

Such refreshing candour is no longer the fashion. The word 'paramountcy' is now seldom heard, and 'baaskap' is reserved for election time in the rural areas. But 'what you will' is very much alive, except that it attempts to hide its parentage so as to gain social acceptance.

White South Africa's exclusive control over South Africa's riches is even less on offer. * Ninety-nine per cent of these are to be found in that part of South Africa which apartheid 'scholars' claim to be the white man's 'natural heritage'. *This racial monopoly over all the essential means of production is the real source of white political dictatorship.* And, in turn, exclusive control of the state apparatus sanctifies and maintains the vast racial imbalance by which South Africa's wealth is appropriated.

** 'White South Africa' is in fact overwhelmingly black. It is white only in relation to access to wealth and power.*

'In our country,' say the ANC,

'more than in any other part of the oppressed world, it is inconceivable for liberation to have meaning without a return of the wealth of the land to the people as a whole. It is therefore a fundamental feature of our strategy that victory must embrace more than formal political democracy. To allow the existing economic forces to retain their interests intact is to feed the root of racial supremacy and does not represent even a shadow of liberation.'⁸

All that the recent signs of so-called enlightenment can be said with confidence to reflect is the system's ability to accommodate itself to internal and world pressures in those areas not crucial to its fundamental patterns of domination. At most we might dare to suggest that the observable back-peddalling at secondary levels of the system, accompanied by division and infighting in the ranks of the oligarchy on the pace of the 'reforms', is some evidence of a ferment within apartheid which renders it more vulnerable to revolutionary assault. As stated by Dr Yusuf Dadoo:

From the point of view of the people, even the small successes such as the recent meagre wage rises create rising expectations and have given them new experience of the potential of united action on a much bigger scale. The forced retreat by the government on the question of certain levels of skilled work for blacks provides a spur for greater achievement in this field and highlights still further in the minds of the African Workers the iniquitous wage gap between them and the whites who previously carried out the same work. The new deceptive labour law places more firmly on the agenda the urgent need to struggle for real trade union rights and the right to strike. Although it was never the regime's intention, the speeding up of the Bantustan programme has put on the agenda as never before the whole question of real political power and national liberation.

Those, then, who maintain that a substantial shift in political power could eventually come through changes by and within the system can only base their prophecy on the faith that the South African ruling class will set a precedent in history and abandon the real source of its power without a fight.

No system can survive without a legitimizing ideology which mobilizes its own battalions and blunts the aspirations of its opponents or accommodates these by deflecting them into channels which bypass the main issues. There are, of course, moments when, feeling itself vulnerable, the ruling class is compelled to venture into new territory, and so unintentionally triggers off fresh energies in its

antagonists. But at the end of the day it will muster all its instruments of force to destroy these energies or divert them into non-vital areas.

So, whatever else may happen, the South African ruling class will not give up the main heights it commands without an intense struggle. It is precisely to prevent the threatened assault on these heights that adjustments are being made on fronts of secondary importance and more substance is being given to the Bantustan schemes.* And it is for the same reason that more action can be expected to remove or alleviate those levels of racial humiliation which are not indispensably functional to the system. The regime hopes in this way to gain black collaboration or acquiescence inside and general support outside South Africa for its more fundamental purposes. It is a measure of the changed chemistry of the situation (inside South Africa, on its immediate borders and in the world generally) that apartheid realizes how necessary such collaboration is, if doom is to be postponed.

*Ironically the apartheid publicists claim that the homelands scheme is an earnest of their sincerity in moving towards 'decolonization' and ending race discrimination. But like Humpty Dumpty in *Alice*, they are past masters at making a word mean 'just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less'. Limited Indian representation in parliament (provided for in a 1946 statute but never implemented) was abolished by the *Indian Representation Act* of 1948. The pass laws were extended to women and to some previously exempted men in the Cape Province by the *Abolition of Passes Act* in 1952 (under this Act the annual rate of pass law arrests reached new heights). The meagre indirect representation of Africans (by three whites) in the central parliament was ended by the *Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act* of 1959. In the same year the right of blacks to attend white universities was ended by the *Extension of University Education Act*. And joint political organization across the colour line was interfered with by the *Prohibition of Political Interference Act*, 1968.

Even some good friends of the black liberation movements are sometimes tempted to allow a celebration of apartheid's reforms to weaken their moral and practical hostility towards it, and to foster the illusion that there may be a route to true democracy in South Africa short of the complete destruction of the white state and the economic base on which it rests. But the new society in South Africa will only come through a successful revolutionary assault by the deprived, in which increasing armed confrontation is unavoidable. To counsel otherwise is in fact to counsel submission.

A war in South Africa will doubtless bring about enormous human suffering. It may also, in its initial stages, see a line-up in which the main antagonists fall broadly into racial camps, and this would add a further tragic dimension to the conflict. Indeed if a

reasonable prospect existed of a powerful enough group amongst the Whites joining in the foreseeable future with those who stand for majority rule, the case for revolt would be less compelling. As it is, the ANC claims that,

The laager-minded white group as a whole moves more and more in the direction of a common defence of what is considered a common fate ... this confrontation on the lines of colour - at least in the early stages of the conflict - is not of our choosing; it is of the enemy's making. It will not be easy to eliminate some of the more tragic consequences.¹⁰

There are those who argue that the consequences of such a conflict - tragic not only for both peoples but because it might well encourage outside forces to take sides on racial lines - are sufficient reasons in themselves to outweigh the passion for immediate radical change. But they are inventing for the black people of South Africa a code of social morality which no people in such conditions have ever accepted. To the black ear such reasoning has an especially hypocritical ring when it comes from editorial writers in Europe whose countries, in this century alone, have given the lives of scores of millions of their youth to ward off or destroy what they conceived to be tyranny. They would certainly endorse the spirit of Gladstone's remarks about Britain when he said: 'If the people of this country had obeyed the precept to eschew violence and maintain order, the liberties of this country would never have been obtained.'¹¹

Nevertheless, a commitment to violence cannot be grounded on a speculation that the alternative would take a little longer. The path to which South Africa's national liberation movement is committed is not one which it has selected from a group of viable alternatives. There *is* no other path to the winning of majority rule over the whole of South Africa, for the simple reason that all other routes are permanently barred.

Yet one may concede all this and still continue to question the liberation movement's commitment to the strategy of revolutionary force. This may be done from one of two positions. Either (like some of the Bantustan leaders) one may dismiss the feasibility of victorious violent resistance in the context of such a vast imbalance of power and resources between the antagonists (an argument which will be considered later); or one may maintain that enlightened pressures from within the white group (although minimal at present) will escalate, and in the foreseeable future create conditions for a less painful road to democratic advance. In support of this hope, one cannot point to the adjustments which have already taken place; for this would be to overlook their peripheral and defensive nature and to ignore the factors which triggered them off.

When the white opposition leader voices the well-worn cliché of counter-insurgency that 'the only way to win the war against insurgency is to create conditions in which it

could not take root',¹² he pays tribute to the impact which even the threat of force is making on the thinking of the white establishment. This kind of thinking (echoed by Nationalist politicians, army men and others), the ever-so-slight breeze of change suggested in the Progressive Party gains in the 1974 election, and in the marginal reforms which are being floated, underscore not growing white enlightenment, but the imperative relevance of the language of force. Dilute this language, and Vorster's so-called 'voice of reason' will become correspondingly less audible. Translate it into a sustained confrontation, and conditions may well emerge in which white intransigence on the main issues is forced to weaken, and talk of dialogue may no longer be a prescription for surrender.

Until then the seeds of revolt will continue to find nourishment, and no amount of surgery to remove 'unnecessary irritating laws' will prevent their germination. It is those laws and institutions that are considered 'necessary' to maintain white domination which count, and not the peripheral reforms which are both a response to the threat of force and, hopefully for Vorster, a defence against it. To create conditions in which insurgency cannot take root in the South African context means nothing less than to set the stage for an immediate advance towards majority rule. And this can only be brought about from a position of revolutionary strength and not supplication.

The inclusion of armed activity in the political struggle has not always been part of the strategy of South Africa's liberation movements, even though the dislodging of white supremacy in South Africa was never possible without it. Its adoption in the early sixties represented a departure from previous tactics (the significance of the change will be dealt with in Chapter 4). But let it be emphasized at the outset that in discussing revolutionary violence, the South African movement is not playing at war games. Insurgency in the context of a popular liberation struggle is not merely a confrontation between two bodies of armed combatants; *if* this were the case no guerrilla force could, in the long term, match the professional armed might of the modern state. Its ability to commence military operations, to sustain itself and eventually to create an all-round climate of collapse in which a direct political solution becomes possible, is not the function of military tactics alone; it is dependent upon a comprehensive political strategy in which the core factor is the mobilization of a popular revolutionary base. Unless the struggle is supported by this base, serves it and is guided by it, it has as dismal a future as an isolated group of bandits would have. Looked at in this light, popular insurgency is a continuation of the political struggle by means which include armed actions.

Although the introduction of force influences every other level of political endeavour, it is nevertheless political and not military leadership that must remain supreme. For this to be so, there must be a unified political movement with a common understanding of the main perspectives and the tasks which flow from them

at every given stage of the conflict: in other words, a movement which embraces a theory of revolution which is not just an academic exercise in social analysis but provides correct guidelines for action.

The starting point of our analysis and our assessments of the future perspectives must, therefore, be the theory of the South African revolution. This must be firmly rooted in the economic, political and historical peculiarities of the South African situation. But at the same time, if it is to dig beneath appearances and beyond the over-simplified race equation, such a theory must also draw on the treasure house of those fundamental propositions of Marxism which have a universal relevance, and on the experience of revolutionary forces which have fought other battles - both successful and unsuccessful - for radical change. The accumulated wisdom of revolutionary theory and experience is relevant to every part of the world; the accusation that Marxism is 'foreign ideology' is an attempt by a ruling class to put parochial blinkers on a subject people.

In attempting to discuss and elaborate the ideological framework of the South African revolution, I am certainly not venturing into virgin territory. South Africa is the home of two political organizations, the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party, which pioneered working-class and national movements on the African continent. Both have behind them a long history of struggle (much of it in conditions of illegality) in the course of which they have accumulated a wealth of revolutionary theory and practice. The one, the ANC, is the main constituent of the liberation front in its quest for immediate majority rule. Founded in 1912, it is a national mass movement representing the African people in whom it has helped to develop a common consciousness and a feeling of one-ness in the face of earlier tribal sectarianisms which made piecemeal conquest so much easier. The other, founded in 1921, represents the aspirations of the working class and aims for the eventual establishment of a socialist South Africa.

Thus the two most important determinants in the South African socio-economic structure - class and race - have given birth to two complementary streams of revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary organization, each influencing the other and often standing in alliance on those aims they share in common. It is appropriate to begin our more detailed examination of the theory of the South African revolution with the complex interplay of race and class and its consequences for the perspectives of future struggle.

To Follow:

Chapter 2: The Theory of the South African Revolution

Chapter 3: The Resistance

Chapter 4: Perspectives of Armed Struggle

Joe Slovo, South Africa - No Middle Road, 1976

Table 1

(a) Population of South Africa at 30 June 1974

<i>Africans</i>	<i>Coloureds</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Total</i>
17,745,000	2,306,000	709,000	4,160,000	24,920,000
(71,2%)	(9,3%)	(2,8%)	(16,7%)	

Source: Bulletin of Statistics, December 1974, Department of Statistics, Pretoria.
Estimates based in 1970 Census.

(b) Rate of population growth between 1960 and 1970

<i>Africans</i>	<i>Coloureds</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>Whites</i>
36,3%	32,3%	28,7%	2.4%

Source: Preliminary figures released by the Department of Statistics, Pretoria, for the period 8 September 1960 to 6 May 1970.

(c) Distribution of Africans between 'White South Africa' and the 'Homelands'

<i>'White areas'</i>	<i>'Homelands'</i>
8,060,773	6,994,179

Source: Bulletin of Statistics, December 1974, Department of Statistics, Pretoria.
Figures based on 1970 population.

(d) Economically active persons total figures and as a percentage of whole population

<i>Africans</i>	<i>Coloureds</i>	<i>Asians</i>	<i>Whites</i>
6,389,000	807,000	208,000	1,673,000
(70,4%)	(8,9%)	(2,3%)	(18,4%)

Source; Minister of Statistics based on estimates for June 1974, Hansard 6, Col. 4{}0, 9 September 1974.

(e) Distribution of Africans in 'White' areas

<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
4,614,649	3,446,124

Source; Bulletin of Statistics, December 1974, Department of Statistics, Pretoria.
Estimates based on 1970 Census.

(f) Growth of wage-gap in Rand per annum - excluding agriculture, domestic service & railways

<i>Year</i>	<i>Whites</i>	<i>Africans</i>	<i>Gap</i>
1969	2,874	439	2,435
1970	3,213	472	2,741
1971	3,555	519	3,036
1972	3,824	578	3,246

Source:- Bulletin of Statistics, March 1974, Department of Statistics, Pretoria.
(If above categories were included, the gap would be considerably bigger.)